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Western Sahara: continued intimidation against woman human rights defender Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and her family

Woman human rights defender **Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire** and her family are being subjected to continuous intimidation by the Moroccan police. On 25 January 2021, her seventeen year old daughter was stopped by a plain clothed police man who proceeded to question her for approximately one hour until her mother intervened. The police officer threatened to detain Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire for stepping in to help her daughter.

[Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire](#) is a prominent woman human rights defender in Western Sahara. She is a member of Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement, and is active in the El Ayoun human rights community. As part of her human rights activities, she participates in peaceful demonstrations which call for the right to self-determination. In addition, she advocates for the freedom of Sahrawi political prisoners and organises workshops in support of their families.

On 25 January 2021, a plain clothed police man stopped the seventeen year old daughter of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire on one of the main streets at El Ayoun city. According to the woman human rights defender, her child was grabbed aggressively by the police man and was questioned for almost one hour about her personal life and her family. When her mother Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire intervened, the policeman threatened to detain her. The woman human rights defender and her daughter, who is a minor, were reportedly subjected to verbal abuse by the police man. Her daughter had previously been stopped twice by the same police man in December 2020.

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire believes that her daughter is being harassed as a result of her peaceful human rights activism. Since her release from prison on 15 May 2020 Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire has been continually harassed by the Moroccan police. The woman human rights defender has reported being under frequent surveillance by the Moroccan police. On 12 and 13 November 2020, her house was surrounded by plain clothed Moroccan police men, who imposed a ban on her and her family from leaving the house. This ban was not granted by the court, and this type of unauthorised targeting and harassment of human rights defenders in Western Sahara is a common practice by Moroccan authorities. This came after a peaceful demonstration was organised by several Sahrawi human rights defender, to show solidarity with the Sahrawi civilians in Guerguerat. The woman human rights defender was also the victim of an online smear campaign. On 16 September 2020, an online article was published by the media outlet 'sahara wikileaks' that accused her of adultery.

On 27 November 2019, the woman human rights defender was [sentenced](#) to six months imprisonment for "obstruction of justice" and "insulting a public servant". The reason for her arrest and subsequent prison sentence was not disclosed to her or her lawyer. On 15 May 2020, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire was released from El Ayoun prison.

Front Line defenders is deeply concerned about the continual harassment and the intimidation of woman human rights defender Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and her family. Front Line Defenders believes that the woman human rights defender and her family are being targeted solely as a result of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urge the Moroccan authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally remove all restrictions on the free movement of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and her family and cease all further forms of surveillance or harassment against her, as it is believed that these measures are not only solely related to her legitimate human rights activities but, furthermore, constitute a direct transgression of the rights of the woman human rights defender;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Westren Sahara and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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